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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 009269

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [VE](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: BOGOTA MAYOR SEEKS CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH EMBASSY

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) Ambassador Wood met with Bogota Mayor Luis Eduardo (Lucho) Garzon on September 22, at the Mayor's request. In a wide ranging discussion, Garzon requested more contact with the Ambassador and Embassy staff to improve information sharing, particularly on security issues. He asked for assistance in establishing a better working relationship with the head of the Colombian National Police. The mayor expressed concern about the existence of demobilized FARC members in Bogota as well as the growing number of displaced persons in the capital. On recent press reports regarding French-FARC contacts on a humanitarian exchange, Garzon speculated that the FARC was prepared to cut a deal with the French to release Colombian-French hostage Ingrid Betancourt, in an attempt to weaken President Uribe's political position. Garzon also speculated that recent overtures received by the Mayor of Paris were an attempt to enlist his help. He predicted that the Constitutional Court will approve Congressional legislation to permit presidential re-election. Garzon was critical of Hugo Chavez and expressed concerns about the future of the left in Latin America if Chavez becomes its standard bearer.

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Garzon Seeks Closer Relationship with Embassy  
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2. (C) Garzon said he desired a close relationship with the Embassy, suggesting regular meetings with the Ambassador. The Ambassador and Garzon agreed on the need to be in closer touch to share information, particularly on security concerns in Bogota. Garzon also requested Embassy assistance in making contact with the head of the Colombian National Police. The Ambassador agreed to arrange a meeting between the two.

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Increasing Numbers of Demobilized Fighters  
and Displaced Persons in Bogota  
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3. (C) Garzon said he was concerned about the presence of four half-way houses for demobilized FARC members in Bogota. The lack of appropriate resources and few job opportunities for demobilized fighters put the citizens of Bogota at risk. The Ambassador reminded the Mayor that Bogota had to share in the responsibility of helping demobilized fighters return to society. Garzon agreed but criticized GOC handling of the situation, saying that without additional investment, the reinsertion program would fail. Garzon suggested that the GOC focus more on agricultural investment as a way to employ the growing number of demobilized fighters. He added that he had no difficulty with demobilized fighters working in private security.

4. (C) Garzon noted that Bogota's improved economic situation had attracted not only people who were displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict, but also economic migrants from surrounding Departments. Garzon lamented the lack of investment in Cundinamarca (where Bogota is situated) and Boyaca Departments. He expressed concern that Bogota did not have the resources to absorb the influx of people from surrounding areas. The Ambassador suggested that Garzon work with the UN to assist with the displaced population. Garzon responded that the UN was too bureaucratic and noted that some NGOs working these issues were completely politicized.

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FARC Wants to Hurt Uribe with Release of Ingrid Betancourt;  
Increased FARC presence in Cundinamarca Department?  
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5. (C) Garzon said it was a surprise to him to read in the press recently that he had invited the Mayor of Paris to Bogota to discuss the release of Ingrid Betancourt. He denied extending the invitation and speculated that the Mayor of Paris and the former French Ambassador to Colombia Daniel Parfait (now MFA Director for Latin American affairs and the husband of Betancourt's sister) were looking for ways to legitimize French efforts to free Betancourt. Garzon said

the FARC wanted to cut a deal with the French to release Betancourt in an effort to weaken Uribe's political position.

He also believed the FARC have concluded that a freed Betancourt speaking out against Uribe from France could damage the president politically. Garzon said that, while he supported Betancourt's release, he did not want to be used by the French in their efforts to free her.

16. (C) Garzon also expressed concern about a growing FARC presence in Sumapaz, in southwest Cundinamarca Department. He said an "army to army confrontation" was a possibility. (Note. In the 1990s, the high plains of Sumapaz, connecting Cundinamarca with Meta and Huila Departments, was a FARC stronghold and a significant mobility corridor into Bogota. The Sumapaz region also controls an important regional transportation corridor. The army has stationed a brigade there to obstruct FARC movements. End Note.)

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Garzon on Reelection  
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17. (C) Garzon predicted that the Constitutional Court would rule in favor of reelection, but stressed that, in his view, it would not guarantee Uribe's reelection. He claimed to have no opinion on the merits of reelection.

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A Positive Agenda for the Region: Look to the Cities  
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18. (C) Garzon was openly critical of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and expressed concern for the left in Latin America if Chavez were to become its standard bearer. In response to the Ambassador's query about how Garzon would create a positive agenda that would resonate in the region, Garzon said the way to shore up democracy was to focus on the development of cities (where 75 percent of Colombians live). This meant building fiscal accountability, expanding access to quality education, and improving health care. This was his agenda, he said, and that of his party, the Independent Democratic Pole (Polo Democratico Independiente).

19. (C) Garzon noted that Chavez and his supporters here, such as Rep. Gustavo Petro, were trying to bring him into their orbit, which he has rejected. He believes President Lula's troubles in Brazil have created a vacuum on the left in the region.

WOOD